

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
Parole and Community Services Division
Region II
East Bay District
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LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION
California Parole Policy
Oakland Parole
Testimony of Shirley Poe
District Administrator
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It is with great pleasure that I have the opportunity to address you today regarding the issue of Paroles in Oakland. You have expressed an interest to hear first hand about the consequences to parolees, their families and the community when parolees fail to successfully reintegrate into the community. However, before I begin this discussion I believe it is important that I provide you with a profile of the parole operation in Oakland.

The City of Oakland is located in Alameda County. The population of Oakland is 399,484. There are approximately 4700 parolees in Alameda County, 3000 of which reside in the City of Oakland. A question frequently asked is what determines a parolee's placement in a particular City or County? California Penal Code Section 3003 is the legal mandate that states in part, an inmate shall return to the county of his/her last legal residence prior to the inmate's incarceration. This section allows for some exceptions however they can not exceed 5% of the County's Parole population. When the import rate reaches 5% the County is closed and no out of County transfers are allowed. Currently Alameda County's import rate is 3.6%.

The East Bay District located in Region II is comprised of five parole units, Berkeley # 1, Berkeley #2, Oakland #1, Oakland #2 and Oakland #3. Currently there are 50 parole agents responsible for the supervision of approximately 3400 parolees, residing in the Cities of Oakland, Berkeley, Albany, Emeryville and Kensington. The supervision ratio is approximately 75 to 1. The District has 7 specialized caseloads that provide intensive supervision of second strikers and High Risk Sex Offenders at a 40 to 1 ratio.

California has received much attention regarding the number of Parolees returned to Custody for Parole Violations. In Oakland the Return to Custody Rate is 47.3%. The Parole Violator with a New Term Rate is 5.8% for a total Prison Return Rate of 52.61 % slightly lower than the statewide average of 54.2%. Oakland has experienced a decrease in its return to prison rate since 1998 and we attribute this to many of the programs and partnerships we have formed in Oakland.

The Commission has requested a description of criminal activity attributable to parolees in Oakland. There has been much discussion regarding the responsibility of parolees for crime committed in the city of Oakland. While reviewing the types of parole violations committed by parolees in Oakland during the period of January 2002 through December 2002 the following was revealed:

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5 parole violations for Murder, 2 for Attempted Murder, 51 Assault's, 94, Burglary's, 45 Possession of Burglary Tools, 75 Battery's, 30 violations for Possession of a Firearm, 3 for Use of a Firearm, 42 Robbery's, (12 were committed with a firearm), 11 Rapes, 80 Petty Theft's, 71 Auto Burglaries, 1250 violations for Drug and alcohol related offenses (220 of the drug offenses were for Sales or Possession for Sales). There were 49 violations for resisting arrest, 51 for Receiving Stolen Property and other

Many of these violations did not result in criminal prosecutions. In Oakland the rate of parolees who are prosecuted and sent back to prison on a new term is 5.58%. Additionally, while reviewing the Oakland Parole Violations I found the number of parole violations for Serious and Violent Felonies had decreased however, it is my position the number is still more than we can afford. We must continue to explore new and innovative strategies to reduce the number of violations of parole. Additionally, we must explore alternative sanctions for parole violations as an option to returning parolees to prison.

The parole Division is committed to it's Mission of providing public safety and assisting parolees with their reintegration into the community. In October 1999 Region II-East Bay Parole District joined partnership with Oakland Police Department in an effort to reduce crime and recidivism in the City of Oakland. As a result of this partnership the Police and Corrections Team (PACT) was formed. The Team consists of 1 Oakland Police Sergeant, 6 Oakland Police Officers 3 Department of Correction parole Agents, 1 Alameda County Probation officers, 2 United States Marshall's and 1 California Youth Authority Agent. The goals and objectives of PACT are to identify persons on probation or parole with a high probability of recidivism and assist them with leading law abiding lives in the community. To accomplish this early intervention services are provided that include rehabilitation, counseling, job training and in repeated cases incarceration. The teams focus is primarily on rehabilitation and intervention, but incarceration is utilized where there is a threat to the public as evident by repeat probation/parole violations or new criminal charges. Additionally, the team is responsible for identifying and apprehending those persons on probation and parole that are wanted for criminal charges and/or parole violations.

Another component of PACT is the weekly parole orientation meeting provided to parolees recently released to the City of Oakland. The meeting is designed to provide parolees with information on services available to assist them with their reintegration into the community. The service providers are in attendance at the meeting and give presentations on their programs. The parolee is given an opportunity to take advantage of the service immediately by signing up during the meeting. The services offered consist of Computer Literacy Programs, Employment and Vocational Programs, Drug Treatment, Veterans Affairs, Child Support Services and Housing referrals. One of the unique aspects of this orientation is our inclusion of ex-offenders in our partnership, one of whom you will hear from today, Ron Owens. We recognize the importance of parolees hearing first hand how they can become productive law-abiding citizens from people who have once been where they are now. Approximately 7600 parolees have attended the parole orientation since it's inception.

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We discovered the family had to be integral part of the collaboration and as a result we begin a Parole Family Service meeting as part of our PACT program. The meeting is designed to meet with the family or significant others prior to the parolees release. During the meeting we provide information and answer questions regarding parole and the various services available to assist the parolee with his/her reintegration into the community. Prior to release of the inmate onto parole we begin to build a relationship with the family and or significant other. This partnership has proven to be valuable.

Oakland was the pioneer of PACT and since it's inception PACT or it's equivalent has been duplicated throughout the State. In October 2002 at the bequest of Ron Owens, a Documentary on PACT was produced by KTOP Oakland's Government Station called, "Home and Almost Free", The Changing Face of Parole. The film is currently aired on KTOP Channel 10, also shown at Santa Rita Jail Facility and viewed at many Community Based Organizations and Governmental Agencies.

We find that anger and an inability to resolve conflict is pervasive with the parolee population. In an effort to address these issues of anger management and domestic violence we offer a State Certified Domestic Non-Violence Class at the Oakland Parole Office through Second Chance Inc. This program provides parolees with non-violent coping skills for conflict resolution.

In the area of supervision of parolees the Parole Division instituted specialized caseloads throughout the State to provide intensive supervision to parolees who are categorized as second strikers and high risk sex offenders. As mentioned previously Oakland has 7 specialized caseloads. The advantages of these caseloads supervised at 40 to 1 are the agent's ability to provide intensive supervision, monitoring and programming.

In September 2002 in an effort to intervene early with parolees who begin to exhibit signs of failing to reintegrate into the community we began a Parolee Intervention Program. The coordinator Ron Owens is an ex-offender working with the City of Oakland, Mayor's Office and Chief of Police. The purpose of the Intervention Program is to provide peer counseling to deal with the issues causing the parolees failure. The parolee is assessed and directed to the necessary programs according to their individual needs.

In spite of the best efforts that the parole division is making to assist parolees with their reintegration into the community it is important to recognize we face many challenges in achieving our goal. Our clientele is comprised of individuals who have been entrenched in a criminal lifestyle with lack of adequate education, little or no job skills, anger management issues, years of drug and alcohol dependency and little or no family support. National statistics reveal 55 % of the inmates released from prison to parole are homeless within the first year on parole. In the City of Oakland we are also challenged with the issue of adequate housing for parolees. So the solution is not a simple one.

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It is important that we begin to recognize this is not exclusively a Department of Corrections problem this is a community problem. In order to be effective it is crucial partnerships are formed with cities, counties, law enforcement, the faith-based organizations, reformed ex-offenders; community based organization and citizens. In Oakland we recognized the importance of collaboration as we endeavor to reduce parolee recidivism. Planning for parole has to begin during incarceration. The Partnership has to be proactively involved in this process. We can no longer wait for inmates to step out of the prison doors before we prepare them for a successful reintegration into the community.

Additionally this partnership must explore ways to create a community environment that is receptive to parolees returning home who comply with the rules and regulations of society. This can be accomplished by educating the community, and insuring their involvement in the partnership. Additionally the parolee should take an active role in giving back to the community. The partnerships should aim to insure the involvement of Faith Based Communities. This will allow the Faith-Based Organizations to take a more proactive role in working with this population.

Over a year ago in an effort to address the re-entry needs of parolees in the City of Oakland Project Choice was formed. Project Choice is multi-agency collaboration designed to address the re-entry needs of parolees as part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce crime in Oakland. Project Choice Partners include the Mayor's Office, City Council, City of Oakland Department of Human Services (DHS), Oakland Police Department (OPD); State of California Department of Corrections-Parole (CDC); California Youth Authority; San Quentin State Prison; the Oakland Workforce Investment Board; Alameda County Behavioral Health Services; Offender representation; and community based organizations. Project Choice is designed to re-integrate juvenile and young adult parolees ages 16-30 into the Community by providing job development/employment choices, education, and case management/coaching to reduce and prevent recidivism. It builds on leverages and enhances the capacity of an existing and growing multi-agency effort to protect public safety by targeting re-entering parolees for intensive supervision and services.

Recently the City of Oakland received additional funding from a Department of Justice grant entitled "Going Home: Serious and Violent Offender Initiative. This grant will allow us to include re-entry planning in the institutional phase. We will partner with San Quentin and CYA Stockton facilities. Twelve months prior to the parolees release from incarceration the program will begin to serve the inmate. In-depth- assessments will be performed on all the inmates that will enroll in the program. The goal is to begin preparation for his needs inside the institute to prepare for the parolee's re-entry into the community. Once the parolee enters the community all of the necessary support services will be provide during and continue after parole discharge.

We believe the success of this Project will be the intensive pre-release planning and the coaching element. Many feel one of the missing links with this population is the lack of in-depth pre-release planing that is tailored specifically for each parolee's individual needs. Additionally, the parole agent who does an excellent job managing his/her caseload does not have the time to hand

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carried the parolee through many of the steps he or she encounters as they reintegrate into the community. The coaches will work along with the parolee and parole agent to help fulfill this role.

The challenge we have at hand can only be accomplished through the goals and efforts of all the partners. The cost to society is much too great for us not to address the issues dealing with this population. Although this multi-agency Partnership began in Oakland as a response to the rising rate of crime in the City, I believe it has evolved into a devoted group of people who understand the solution doesn't lie with one agency, but the entire collaboration. Once again I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude to the Commission for allowing me the opportunity to address those issues that are important to me as a Correctional Professional.